

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The “Strengthening Democracy” project seeks to encourage greater participation by civil society in overseeing key democratic institutions and effectively involve civil society in public policy making and dialogue among different actors.

Citizen participation, social auditing and accountability are core elements in Ecuador’s new political system. The Political Constitution passed by referendum in September 2008 lays down the major principles for the organization of the State and society on the basis of these precepts within a framework of democracy and rule of law, thus making a substantial breakaway from the country’s legal and political tradition.

It is necessary to analyze and discuss in depth the elements, features and potential of the new concepts that characterize the reformed legal-political structure that the country has created. This includes a fresh re-organization of the institutions that are to be the pillars of the structure of the State. Under this context, the role of civil society as a watchdog and advocacy actor in the various areas has become both necessary and pivotal. PC will develop a series of activities under this project:

Social audits:

Political processes: Act as a watchdog overseeing the selection process for the appointment of new authorities to the following organizations: *Consejo de Participación Ciudadana y Control Social* (Citizen Participation and Social Auditing Council or CPCCS for its initials in Spanish), *Consejo Nacional Electoral* (National Electoral Council or CNE), and *Tribunal Contencioso Electoral* (Electoral Claims Court), and of representatives to the Public Ombudsman’s Office.

This presence in the form of watchdogs seeks, among other things, to encourage transparency in the appointment of authorities to permanent monitoring bodies and to emphasize the need for citizens to have access to information on how these authorities come to be appointed. The aim is to contribute to the gradual creation of a culture of citizen trust in the democratic system.

Legislative processes: Develop citizen oversight of the work done by the National Assembly, particularly on issues related to citizen participation, social audits, electoral systems, justice and the political system as a whole.

Citizen Participation: Conduct an ongoing audit of the work of the definitive CPCCS, paying particular attention to and pressing for the inclusion of corrective actions and measures recommended through the work of the watchdog¹ effort it conducted in 2009.

Citizen Influence:

In order to bolster and oversee the mechanisms of direct democracy set out in the Constitution

¹ In its watchdog report on the CPCCS, *Participación Ciudadana* included a number of observations and recommendations on the workings of the Council, the different types of methodology used and its work agenda. Some of the activities of the next social audit will therefore focus on influencing the new authorities to ensure that these observations and recommendations are taken on board.

and the processes to ensure they function properly, PC will develop activities to monitor and enhance the implementation of some of these mechanisms including the *empty chair*. PC will also seek to have greater involvement in the processes of making law, rules and regulations. This may be implemented through submitting PC proposals; through any of the constitutional mechanisms (signature collection, initiative of a member of the Assembly or by a public institution) or through the follow-up or presentation of comments on proposals from other actors, related to the work areas of PC (the electoral system, political parties, citizen participation, social audits and mechanisms of direct democracy).

Dialogues:

It is important to promote opportunities for the exchange of ideas and the public discussion of issues of prime importance to the country. PC will continue to encourage dialogue in search for agreements between political and social actors through forums, discussions, online opinions, etc. regarding issues of public interest. To this end, agreements have been made and will continue with universities in Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca to jointly organize citizen forums on key issues.

In addition to these activities, PC will seek to articulate a group of civil society organizations (CSO) as a working group or civil society platform, to enhance the role of Ecuadorian CSOs in democracy strengthening by overseeing and contributing to political reform.

Accountability:

In contemporary democracies, we cannot conceive a democratic state devoid of accountability mechanisms for its elected officials. To promote accountability PC will work on various efforts with its 24 coordinators nationwide. Work will be done on the presentation of strategic plans by elected regional and local authorities, and follow-up on achievement and periodical reporting. PC will empower local leaders (coordinators) in tools such as the Access to Information Act, Accountability, Transparency and citizen participation mechanisms (*empty chair*).

Education:

An educated population is better prepared to face the challenges of the future. Under this premise, PC will train Afro-Ecuadorian women on civil, political and social rights. It will also create an online democracy education program for its coordinators and other citizens including potential local leaders to reinforce the concepts of citizen participation, democracy, political influence and leadership.

The *Vive la Democracia* project will continue, with the empowerment of Student Councils, transparency in the election of said councils, and the projection of their members as university, trade association, local and national leaders, applying the theoretical and practical knowledge acquired. PC will elaborate a proposal to be presented to the Ministry of Education and/or other education organizations for regulations governing the electoral systems with a gender approach, and the design of a proposal for codes of co-existence.

PC will also promote local citizen campaigns related to the issues dealt with in the different project components, key relevant issues, and the dissemination of democratic values.

PC will continue to provide the public with objective, timely and reliable information on the political situation and democracy in the country through its e-newspaper *Ciudadanía Informada* (Informed Citizens).